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ABSTRACT

This report examines the transition of youth development in the United States from a social movement to an emerging profession, charting achievements the field has made in developing core competencies and skill standards, training and education programs, career ladders, evaluations, and public awareness. Section 1 describes youth development as multi-dimensional, embracing: a process of human growth and development; a philosophical orientation to social development and community; and a programmatic framework for youth services. Section 2 discusses youth development as a professional field, explaining how to use the normative model to measure youth development as a profession. Section 3 examines the progress of youth development along the path of professionalization. Section 4 focuses on promising advances toward the professionalization of youth development work, looking at the need to address heterogeneity in the field; establish core competencies and skill standards; advance inservice training needs; promote preservice education programs; increase career awareness; and promote professional identification with the field. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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Youth Development:

On the Path Towards Professionalization

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Andrew Hahn and Gordon Raley

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Youth development in the United States is making a transition from social movement to emerging profession. This paper marks the path of this transition and charts achievements the field has made in developing core competencies and skill standards, training and education programs, career ladders, evaluations, and public awareness. The authors look at youth development in this transitional stage and suggest needed next steps which should give nonprofit managers of youth and human service organizations additional perspectives on staff development.

Introduction

Is there a youth development field? For Manny, in the South Bronx, there is. His Big Brothers Big Sisters' mentor, with guidance from youth development case managers, meets with him weekly. For Kovina, the setting is a large social service agency in Baltimore, affiliated with the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). But she too knows the field of youth development. Her clinical case manager, trained by CWLA in positive youth development practice, helps her acquire life skills and competencies to avoid a second pregnancy. In churches, summer camps, after-school programs, and community-based youth organizations, youth development is delivered. Youth development professionals prowl tough streets and suburban malls; they ply their craft managing storefront facilities and administering big downtown youth-serving agencies. But do they form a profession? The skilled staff who work with early adolescents and older teens have little doubt. But in the academic literature and within the career counseling offices of secondary and postsecondary schools, there is uncertainty. Is youth development itself a profession or simply a convenient organizing concept describing specialized workers who have deeper and clearer ties to other professions? This article discusses what being a profession means and notes challenges and opportunities that exist for the field of youth development on its path toward professionalization.

Part I:
What is Youth Development?

Youth development is multidimensional, embracing: (1) a process of human growth and development; (2) a philosophical orientation to social development and community; and (3) a programmatic framework for youth services (Edginton 1995).

Youth Development As a Process of Human Growth and Development

Youth development is age-specific. It assumes that there are certain growth-related tasks that adolescents must complete to develop into mature adults. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report, *A Matter of Time* (1992), defines youth development as "the process through which adolescents actively seek, and are assisted, to meet their basic needs and build their individual assets or competencies." This definition focuses on positive outcomes and distinguishes youth development from deficit approaches which view youth as "problems, liabilities, or at best, unfinished projects" (Academy for Educational Development, 1993). As contrasted to youth development, deficit approaches often lead to services focused narrowly either on treating problems or on preventing risky behaviors instead of addressing the *full range* of needs and competencies required by young people to become productive, healthy adults.

More than 20 years ago, the federal Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Administration (YDDPA) identified relevant ado-

lescent needs in a youth development model as: a sense of competency, a sense of usefulness, a sense of belonging, and a sense of power or potency. In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, in *Turning Points* (1989), identified sixteen critical tasks for adolescents to accomplish to become productive and responsible adults. They clustered these tasks in five developmental areas: 1) cognitive development; 2) social development; 3) physical development; 4) emotional development, and 5) moral development. Many programs have found these definitions of needs and competencies instrumental in fine-tuning or radically altering their program designs and staff training to truly identify themselves as youth development agencies. This shift from focusing on youth problems and the correction of undesirable behavior to the full development of young people reflects a growing consensus that youth development, as a paradigm, is more effective in producing positive youth outcomes (and coincidentally in reducing risky behaviors) than more traditional treatment and prevention approaches.

Youth Development As a Philosophical Orientation to Social Development and Community

Youth development's philosophy involves families and communities. It supports healthy development in an environmental context. Young people are not "clients" in this model but partners. Their families are not incidental to the process, their neighbors are not indifferent bystanders, and other community resources are not ignored.

Youth Development as a Programmatic Framework for Youth Services

Several studies have identified elements of effective youth development programs. In an assessment conducted for the National 4-H Council, Saito and her colleagues (1993) identified the following characteristics of effective programs:

- a focused and articulated vision
- a sustained and holistic approach
- a supportive, flexible atmosphere for staff
- collaborations with other community programs
- workers who are committed to their clients

- caring relationships between staff and young people
- an empowerment orientation
- creative problem-solving

Similarly, in 1994, the National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations, the federal Center for Substance Abuse and Prevention, and the Metropolitan Life Foundation convened an issue forum, including youth representatives, on successful youth development approaches to preventing alcohol and drug abuse (National Assembly, 1994a). The forum identified six essential elements of effective youth development programs:

- a comprehensive strategy with clear mission and goals;
- committed, caring, professional leadership;
- youth-centered activities in youth-accessible facilities;
- culturally competent and diverse programs;
- youth ownership and involvement;
- a positive focus including all youth;

The commonality of these principles indicates that youth development organizations are thinking through the premises which guide their work. It also indicates a growing body of knowledge common to the field of youth development.

The Diversity and Scale of Youth Development Programs

Youth development programs involve a wide range of activities including community-based social services, sports and recreation, peer counseling, mentoring, arts, values education, leadership development, community service or volunteerism, literacy, after-school programs, career counseling, job skills and life skills training, parenting skills development, camping, environmental education, and ethnic or cultural enrichment. This incredible diversity in the youth development domain is both a primary virtue and a source of definitional confusion.

The Carnegie Council report, *A Matter of Time*, identified five kinds of organizations that deliver community-based youth development programs:

- private, nonprofit, nationally affiliated youth organizations;
- grassroots, community-based youth development organizations not affiliated with any national structures;
- religious youth organizations;
- adult service clubs, sports organizations, senior citizens groups, and museums that run youth programs; and
- selected public-sector institutions, including libraries and parks and recreation departments that offer services for young people.

The Council estimated that roughly 17,000 organizations within those five categories offer community-based youth development services, but there is, as yet, no reliable estimate of how many youth development professionals they employ. Based on responses from its youth development salary and benefits survey, as part of the DeWitt Wallace - Readers Digest Fund sponsored *Charting the Future Project* (National Assembly, 1996a), the National Collaboration for Youth has estimated that perhaps as many as 300,000 full- and part-time staff work for private, nonprofit, nationally affiliated youth organizations within the first category alone.

Part II: Youth Development as a Professional Field

Some clarity is helpful about the term *profession* and how it differs from references to *field*, *occupation*, and *career*, since these terms are often used interchangeably with regard to youth development. In this article, the term *field* refers to a broad area of human interest or activity, usually relating to an area of academic interest, a profession, an area of employment, or a business. In this sense, there is no question that youth development can be referred to appropriately as a field.

The term *occupation* refers to one's regular source of livelihood. In short, it is a job — perhaps with a specific job title and job description. Thus, "outreach worker" might be seen as an occupation title applied to selected direct service providers within the field of youth development.

The term *career* refers to a general progression of one's working life. Unlike references to an occupation, *career* connotes a series of occupations, a chosen lifework — a "career ladder" of occupations in the same field. In this context, the field of youth development can be viewed appropriately as a career. A "child/youth care worker" might reasonably expect to become a "program director" and perhaps later a "center director" or "program administrator." In the *Charting the Future of Youth Development* project, participants identified, within nine broad categories, 57 separate occupational titles in the United States of individuals employed in nationally affiliated youth development organizations (National Assembly, 1996a). The broad categories included: management/administration, financial support, administrative support, membership and marketing, functional administrative specialists, supervisory personnel, and direct service providers.

Interestingly, while the title "youth work supervisor" was found among the 57 occupational titles, the title "youth worker" was not, suggesting that the term "youth worker," often used to describe all those employed in the field of youth development, might be used more appropriately to refer collectively to direct service providers, which, in the survey, included 16 separate occupational titles. Throughout this article, then, the term "youth development professional," rather than "youth worker," will be used to refer to all those who are employed in the field or career of youth development.

But when does a career or a field emerge as a profession? Advocates of professionalization need some criteria by which to gauge their progress along the path toward professional recognition. Professional status is widely granted to the careers of medicine, law, education, and social work. Nursing and psychology enjoy broad recognition. Where is youth development in relation to these professions? How can one tell?

Using the Normative Model To Measure Youth Development as a Profession

A normative model of a profession has been most precisely articulated by Ernest Greenwood (1957). In his classic article, "*Attributes of a Profession*," Greenwood canvassed the sociological literature on occupations to determine what distinguished professions from non-professions. He concluded that the distinguishing factors are: a body of systematic theory that informs its practice; practitioners who have a monopoly of judgment over their clients based on their knowledge and expertise; training centers, accreditation, curriculum, admissions and licensing systems that regulate and control who can be a member of the profession; ethical codes of conduct that govern professional behavior; and a professional culture that is promoted and sustained in institutional settings, educational and research centers, and through professional associations. In Greenwood's scheme, once a field achieves these "attributes" it can legitimately call itself a profession.

But Greenwood's model overlooks social factors that may influence achievement of professional status. For example, when a line of work is dominated by women, it often has more difficulty establishing its professional authority (Preston, 1994). The difficult path followed by the profes-

sion of nursing in gaining recognition from the male-dominated field of medicine is illustrative. Fields in which the clients are politically controversial, or in which the problems posed by the clients' environment are conceptualized as multiple and complex, do not achieve the same professional standing as professions whose clients have more status, power, and income and whose problems can be addressed effectively in a piecemeal fashion (Abbott, 1995). Finally, fields that are integrated horizontally across domains of education, care, and development but not vertically across the life span have less professional status (Vanderven, 1992).

Based on these considerations, youth development can expect a more difficult time establishing its professional status using the Greenwood normative model. It is a field that likely employs more women (National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, 1993); it has a commitment to serving clients who are often disenfranchised and whose environments present problems that are complex and not easily solved; and, it is focused on the needs of a specific, yet heterogenous age group.

Part III: The Progress of Youth Development Along the Path of Professionalization

Greenwood's work nevertheless provides a widely accepted and rigorous scale by which to measure progress toward professionalization. By so doing, it also provides a source of "next steps" to those working for professional recognition.

First, a field must have **a body of systematic theory that informs its practice**. As evidenced earlier, youth development does have an emerging body of theory that includes adolescent development, principles of practice regarding the promotion of competencies, and an approach that can be differentiated from those based on treatment and prevention. There is likewise growing agreement among youth development organizations about the principles that guide their work. When discussion, however, turns to defining standards and assessing organizational practice against these standards, a consensus has been harder to reach and is still emerging.

Secondly, the normative model calls for **practitioners who have a monopoly of judgment over their clients based on their knowledge and expertise**. This calls to mind the example of doctors and lawyers. Generally, only doctors can prescribe drugs. Only lawyers can represent a client in court. Such a "monopoly of judgement" is not yet recognized for youth development professionals but can be imagined.

The third criteria calls for **training centers, accreditation, curriculum, admissions, and licensing systems that regulate and control who can be a member of the profession**. To address this criteria, there would need to be firm requirements for what it takes to become a youth develop-

ment professional and some process of credentialing. Any field without established accreditation or credentials is more likely to have low pay and questionable status. Doctors and nurses must pass board exams and lawyers must pass bar exams. In many states, social workers are now required to be licensed. As youth development moves toward professional recognition, its practitioners will increasingly be called upon to organize as a profession and advocate restrictions on practice. There is precedence in related developmental fields. Child development practitioners, for example, are increasingly being required to be credentialed or licensed by state law.

Besides licensing and credentialing, educational attainment is often a prerequisite for entrance into a profession. One must, for example, attend law, medical, or nursing school to be admitted into those respective professions. In the field of youth development, much of its curriculum is best described as in-service training, rather than pre-service education. It is conducted on the job by those who employ youth development professionals. While many nationally affiliated, youth development agencies have benefited from in-service training models developed by their national organizations, unaffiliated, community-based organizations still face many unmet needs.

The existence of **ethical codes of conduct that govern professional behavior** is not in place for youth development professionals since there first must be a body of such professionals to agree upon a code. Indeed, establishing a professional association of practitioners would also address Greenwood's last criteria for professional status, a **professional culture that is promoted and sustained in institutional settings, educational and research centers, and through professional associations**. Such an association does not now exist. Establishing a professional association does not presume a division of labor and management, since the association, like the career of youth development, would include direct service workers, supervisors, managers, and administrators within its ranks.

Part IV: Promising Advances Toward the Professionalization of Youth Development Work

The process of professionalizing the career of youth development has received momentum from a number of different sources including the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the National Assembly and its National Collaboration for Youth, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, trade press such as *Youth Today*, and various University-affiliated groups such as Brandeis's Center for Human Resources and the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center. Virtually all of these groups have suggested that the field is worthy of the designation "profession," but all have also written about the need for further professionalization. Collectively they have attempted to address the heterogeneity in the field; to establish core competencies and skill standards; to advance in-service training needs; to promote pre-service education programs; to increase career awareness; and to promote professional identification with the field of youth development.

Addressing Heterogeneity in the Field

The youth development field's heterogeneity and its resulting difficulty in collecting routine, standardized information poses barriers to professional recognition. Workers define themselves and the work they do in vastly different ways. Many identify with the settings in which they work rather than the field of youth development. The National Collaboration for Youth's *Charting the Future* project has provided a multi-year salaries and benefits

survey of youth development professionals employed by nationally-affiliated agencies. Its descriptions of job titles, work performed, salary and benefit data, and educational requirements will be useful in strengthening the identity of the field which is given little visibility in publications and settings that young people use to make career decisions. But youth development leaders need continued opportunities to develop uniform definitions and conduct repetitive data collection. They also need to classify part-time professionals and support staff whose work is largely administrative, yet have considerable contact with young people.

Establishing Core Competencies and Skill Standards

Establishing the knowledge and skills that professionals need to be competent is a central task for any emerging profession. It is particularly difficult for professions in which work sites and jobs are decentralized and diverse. Since 1993, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has funded several projects designed to identify core competencies, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that youth development professionals need to perform their jobs effectively, regardless of work settings. This information has been aimed at informing the development of a common in-service training curriculum. Most recently, the National 4-H Council, as part of its *Strengthening Our Capacity to Care Project*, developed a research and knowledge taxonomy for youth development professionals (National 4-H Council, 1996). The taxonomy was comprised of five domains: youth and adult development; learning strategies for youth development; organizational systems for youth development; partnerships for youth development; and volunteerism and youth development. The domains include:

- **Youth and Adult Development** - knowledge of the growth and development process over the life-span and its application in the creation of environments which optimize human potential. Under this domain, youth development professionals understand: physical development, emotional development, youth development philosophy, cognitive development, social development, and resiliency theory and practice.
- **Learning Strategies for Youth Development** - knowledge of learning theory and its application in the design and evaluation of learning expe-

riences for positive youth development. Under this domain, youth development professionals understand: learning theory, learning media, incentives for learning, educational strategies, learning styles, learning environments, curriculum development, and evaluation.

- **Organizational Systems for Youth Development** - knowledge of organization systems and resource management practices that lead organizations to the fulfillment of their missions. Under this domain, youth development professionals understand: institutional frameworks, administrative planning, advisory groups, information management systems, marketing systems, program delivery strategies, organizational leadership, human resource systems, financial management systems, risk management systems, and facilities management.
- **Partnerships for Youth Development** - knowledge of the process and contextual factors which enhance the ability of community members to work together to improve the quality of life for youth and their families. Under this domain, youth development professionals understand: collaboration and partnering; community volunteerism; community structures, systems, and processes; community capacity building; and fund development.
- **Volunteerism for Youth Development** - knowledge related to adult and youth development, organizational systems, volunteer research and management practices to build and maintain volunteer management systems for the delivery of youth development programs. Under this domain, youth development professionals understand the needs of adult and youth volunteers and have competency in volunteer management including: role identification, recognition, orientation, risk management, supervision, selection, policies, recruitment, evaluation, and training.

Consensus around the identification and definition of core competencies is a prerequisite for the articulation of performance standards leading to the design of appropriate training and the development of portable credentials.

Advancing In-Service Training Programs

In-service training is primarily directed towards those who are already in the field of youth development. Unfortunately, many youth agencies,

especially those not nationally affiliated, have limited capacity to provide in-service training. Many funding agencies, in trying to assure that their funds support services rather than overhead, often cap the percentage of a youth program's budget that can be used for administration, the broad category that usually includes staff training (Hahn, 1994). But without staff training, young people are not well served.

While the value of in-service training is obvious, the most effective way to provide this training is still being explored. Traditionally, training opportunities outside the work site, when they have existed at all, have been held at large, national or regional conferences. Many times these conferences are too costly and time-consuming for direct service workers to attend. Effective training must address the broad needs of all youth development professionals and not just planners, managers and administrators.

Several efforts are under way to develop youth development in-service training programs. The Justice Department's Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has funded the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and the National Network for Youth to develop a 30-hour curriculum on youth development and to pilot the curriculum in ten communities. The curriculum is designed for direct service youth workers and supervisors, especially those who serve youth from "high-risk" situations.

Since 1990, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has supported more than 1,400 in-service training events for more than 28,000 youth development staff. When the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund first funded staff development projects, they provided national youth serving organizations with resources to train staff in organization-specific programs. Since 1993, they have encouraged training using a sector-wide approach. Better understanding of principles underlying youth development and the competencies staff need to practice have facilitated cross-organizational training (DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 1996).

But the lack of a widely accepted system for accrediting workers who complete training makes it difficult to interest workers since in-service training, by itself, may have little direct effect on their upward mobility. Devising a system of accreditation which rewards the completion of in-service training would be an important task for an emerging profession.

Establishing Pre-Service Education Programs

Pre-service education, perhaps a hallmark of professional recognition, involves educational experiences before a youth development professional enters the field, usually linked with colleges and universities. The standard route to a professional career is to enroll in a college or university-based professional school that provides a credential that certifies one as a professional.

At present, there are few pre-service education programs that prepare professionals for careers in youth development (Long and Martinez 1992). The University of Northern Iowa has established one program of interest which offers an undergraduate certification and a Masters degree in Youth and Human Service Administration. The curriculum teaches youth development, leadership, and management. Their Institute of Youth Leaders, established in 1991, seeks to build partnerships with community professionals and provides leadership in research, development, and diffusion of knowledge. Its primary purpose is to establish an intellectual foundation for the emerging academic discipline of youth development. By working in concert with youth organizations in the immediate community, the Institute tries to ensure that programs and models are grounded in the realities of the profession (Long and Martinez, 1992:39).

Springfield College, in Springfield, Massachusetts, is in the process of developing a major in "Youth Development Services." The impetus to develop such a major, according to Springfield officials, came from the "documented placement of thousands of our alumni in youth serving positions, who nevertheless did not major in youth service; and the expressed desire for us to consider developing such a major for youth serving agencies such as the YMCA of the USA and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, with whom we have long-standing formal and/or informal affiliations"(Rau, 1996).

Other noteworthy examples of university-based training include Brandeis University's Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, NOVA in Florida, the American Humanics program, and the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. Brandeis offers a master's degree in Management of Human Services, with a specialization in "children, family and youth" management and policy and is studying a new 5-year undergraduate/graduate degree for students preparing for work in the youth development field. Chapin Hall, an independent think-tank associated with the

University of Chicago, is exploring a proposal for a Youth Development Associate Credential, and the University of Minnesota has offered many students customized opportunities to study youth development.

Increasing Career Awareness

Career counselors have not yet recognized the youth development field as a career alternative. As a consequence, few high school or college students enter the field via traditional routes. A barrier to recognition as a career has been the lack of information on what jobs exist within youth development programs. The National Collaboration for Youth's three-year survey on salaries, benefits, and educational requirements for positions within the youth development field was intended, in part, to identify the breadth of the field and the range of career opportunities that exist within it. During the project's last year, more than 1,000 agencies were surveyed. Findings suggested that a career path did indeed exist within the youth development field. Chief executive officers/executive directors, deputy or assistant executive directors occupied the higher rungs, followed by fund development directors, supervisors, and other managerial positions. Direct service providers and direct service support staff earned salaries corresponding to entry level positions. (National Assembly, 1996a).

The National Collaboration for Youth also conducted informal surveys of youth development professionals to find out how they entered the field. Results indicate that many enter the field either through volunteer or internship experiences or through their own participation in youth development programs. Career counselors were one of the least likely sources for learning about the profession. Project staff concluded:

There appears to be no organized career development system for informing potential employees about career opportunities within the youth development profession. Career counselors who rely heavily on career development resources . . . published by the U.S. Department of Labor lack adequate information on the youth development profession or the range of career opportunities within the field. (Helfgott, 1993).

As one way to address this lack of awareness, the National Collaboration for Youth has developed a *Directory of Internships in Youth Development*

(National Assembly, 1994b; National Assembly, 1995) that gives students and career counselors pertinent information on internship opportunities within youth development organizations. This directory has now been placed on the Assembly's Internet website. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Collaboration has also developed a career publication, *Something to Say Yes To: Careers in Youth Development* (National Assembly, 1996b), which profiles the occupations of six individuals on various rungs of the youth development career ladder.

Promoting Professional Identification

There is encouraging evidence that many within the field of youth development are beginning to identify with the field. A survey of 53 workers conducted by Susan Hanzelka (1994) found that 77.4 percent of those surveyed considered themselves to be youth development professionals. But promoting professional identification will take time. Workers need to be trained in the youth development perspective and have opportunities to connect with other professionals. Nurturing youth development publications and professional associations are important ways to develop professional identity.

Creating a professional youth development culture is an element of professional life that is perhaps least amenable to change by outside advocates of professionalization. Government and philanthropy have found it especially difficult to support interventions aimed in this direction. Very often funders have felt obliged to support direct services rather than infrastructure. Yet this remaining challenge is fertile ground for new investments. Among promising strategies are support for: self-studies, professional associations, new journals, organizational renewal projects, opportunities for exchange of information through clearinghouses and electronic forums, and peer-to-peer practitioner networks.

To be recognized as a profession, the use of Greenwood's normative model by youth development professionals is helpful. Applying that model, it is clear that a theoretical knowledge base needs to be strengthened, as well as knowledge related to direct practice. This is beginning to happen. The creation of a professional association would provide an appropriate setting

where professionals from diverse settings within the youth development world could meet and share this knowledge, as well as their experiences.

The reach of the youth development field needs to be better defined. Much of what is now known has been derived from private, nonprofit, nationally-affiliated youth organizations. Considerably less is known about youth development professionals serving in grassroots, community-based organizations not affiliated with national structures, religious youth organizations, social service organizations, adult service clubs, sports organizations, and selected public youth service programs. Again, the creation of a professional association, where professionals, by joining, could define their involvement would be helpful. Such an association could provide professional development activities in which, heretofore, unaffiliated agency workers have been under represented.

Both in-service training and pre-service education programs are critical to youth development. At present, more attention is paid to training people who are already working in the field, although even here there is an unevenness between training for direct service staff and the more abundant opportunities for managers and administrators. Efforts are underway to develop training programs that cut across agency settings. This work should be advanced to the stage where the development of a training certificate that is portable and recognizable across organizations is achieved.

In the end, recruitment and retention are perhaps the biggest steps the field of youth development can take toward professionalization. Increased awareness of youth development as a career must be fostered among high school and college students considering their futures. Then, better methods must be found to keep youth development professionals, up and down the career ladder, from leaving the field. Some of this involves achieving appropriate salaries and benefits and at least some of that will depend on credentialing. But fostering a common culture among youth development professionals will help. The more such a culture exists, the more likely these professionals will identify proudly with the field of youth development and remain. Regardless of whether youth development becomes a profession, the sooner many of these steps toward professionalization are taken, the more certain the country can be that a cadre of workers exists who are consistently committed to building assets in the lives of American youth, independent of shifts in federal policy or philanthropic funding.

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